

# *State Representative* **HELEN SOMMERS**

## **Session Review 2007**



### ***CHILDREN'S HEALTH***

Legislators have committed to providing health care for all children in the state by 2010. We took another significant step by increasing coverage to 38,000 more children this year. The increased funding expands care to about 624,000 children. The legislation also calls for schools to provide healthy food choices and weekly physical education.

### ***CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE***

Expanded help to children in foster care includes college scholarships, medical coverage increased from age 18 to 21, and help in finding housing as they leave foster care.



## **CHILDREN AND EDUCATION – OUR PRIMARY FOCUS**

### ***THE EDUCATION SESSION***

The session's major focus, and funding, was on education – from early learning to university. Our new Department of Early Learning, and research on the infant brain at the University of Washington, have made clear the importance of stimulating learning in the very young. The 2007-09 budget provides support for early reading initiatives to parents and community organizations.

### ***K-12***

The budget also provides an increase to K-12 education of over 14% – including special focus on math and science. Funding is provided to review and strengthen math and science curricula, to increase teacher preparation in these areas, and for extending all-day kindergarten.

High school students got a reprieve and won't be required to pass the math and science parts of our statewide tests in order to graduate. The requirement is delayed until 2013. This seems too long. But professionals argued that new curricula must be implemented before the higher achievement level is feasible.

### ***HELP FOR K-12 - SCHOOL LEVIES***

Local special levies for schools require a super majority vote – a 60% "yes". A measure was approved for the November ballot to change this constitutional requirement to the standard majority vote of over 50%. Districts with records of 57, 58, 59% "yes" votes and a failed school levy are strong supporters of this proposed change.

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## MAJOR FOCUS ON COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

### *Higher Education*

This is what the *Oregonian* newspaper said about Washington's higher ed budget: "The Washington Legislature finished a session of dazzling advances for that state's system. It increased Washington's enrollment by 9700 (including 3700 high-cost high-demand engineering and science slots), limited tuition increases, and added \$86 million in new scholarship and grant aid."

I am pleased with the higher ed budget – but this critical investment in our state was long over due.

A significant number of new jobs in our state require skills beyond high school level. We funded over 9700 new enrollments in the community colleges and universities – a record increase. However, we still fall below the average number of four-year degrees awarded in our peer group of global challenge states.

Over the two-year budget period the University of Washington will receive funding for 1800 additional enrollments –1300 general enrollments and 500 in math and science.



### *Costs of Higher Education*

Attending high school is free, courtesy of the taxpayer. But the next step to college or university requires a significant sum from the student or family. Our high-tech economy requires a high level of skill and education—provided at the two-year community college and four-year university levels. Present annual tuition (excluding fees and books) is:

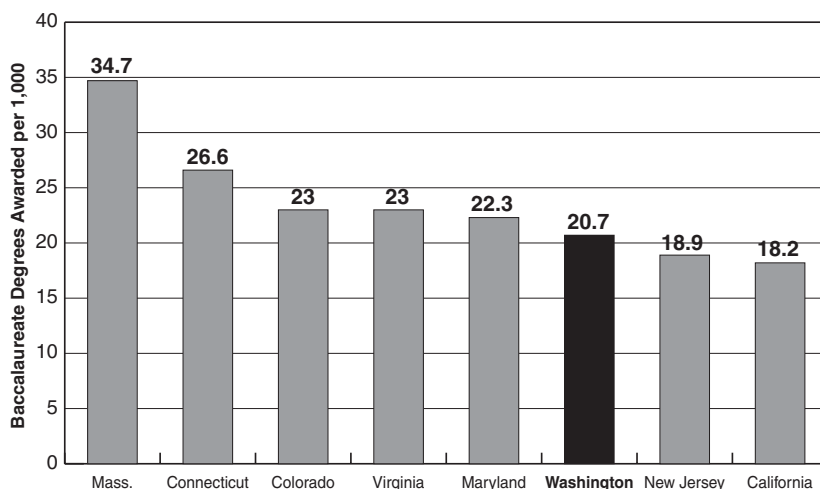
University of Washington	\$5460
Western and Evergreen	\$3894
Community Colleges	\$2327

### *Financial Aid*

Several new scholarship programs are designed to assist targeted groups and provide needed skills.

- A new public-private program will fund grants to math and science majors in our universities who have excelled in these fields in high school, earn a related degree, and work in a math or science-related field for three years following graduation.
- The Passport to College Program will provide counseling, financial aid, and support services to help foster care youth succeed in college.
- Opportunity Grants will fund tuition and books for low income community college students enrolled in high demand fields identified by industry, and prepare the students for these jobs.

### Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded in Global Challenge States



# SESSION REVIEW 2007

## ALASKAN WAY VIADUCT PROJECT

The full Viaduct replacement project extends from south of Holgate Street to the Battery Street Tunnel and is projected to be completed over six years. The transportation budget for this biennium provides \$371 million; the entire project is estimated at \$2.4 billion. This year the Department of Transportation will begin construction work on early safety and mobility improvements at the north and south ends of the project – delaying a decision on the critical elevated portion along the downtown waterfront.

This decision by DOT avoids the controversy over the approximately ten blocks along downtown – for now. A poll shows that 36th District voters prefer the elevated structure while other sections of the city prefer a tunnel. A tunnel would significantly increase the project cost; a mid-range estimate is \$4.6 billion for a six-lane tunnel.



## CELL PHONES AND DRIVERS

Lawmakers passed a measure that requires drivers to use hands-free devices when talking on their cell phones. Another new law prohibits text messaging while driving. Both would be secondary infractions, meaning if you are pulled over for another reason, such as speeding, you could face an extra \$101 fine.

## ONLINE VOTER REGISTRATION

Residents will be able to register to vote on line, by filling out an application on the Secretary of State's Website. A state driver's license or state ID will be required, along with full name, date of birth, and address.

The voter database is connected to the Department of Licensing, which has signatures and photos on file.

## SCHOOL MAPPING FOR SAFETY

Washington is the national leader in working with the Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs to provide digital maps of public buildings. The maps show floor plans, including



emergency entry and exit, and critical information such as hazardous materials and emergency shutoff valves. Funding was provided in the capital budget to complete mapping of the entire K-12 school system.

## TOUCH OF CULTURE AND HISTORY AND WEATHER

We created the position of state poet laureate. The State Arts Commission is charged with initiating a poet laureate program. I'm advised that 40 other states already have a poet laureate.

A large capital project on central Capitol Campus was approved – construction of a Heritage Center designed to house the State Library, State Archives, and other historical documents. The Center will be built on the main Capitol campus, on the top of the hill with a fine view of Capitol Lake, Budd Inlet and out toward Puget Sound.

Action taken this session created the position of state climatologist and approved a measure to reduce climate change – outlining goals to reduce emissions and the impacts of coal-fired power plants.



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## **GREEN WASHINGTON**

### ***PUGET SOUND PARTNERSHIP***

A new agency in the Governor's office is tasked with cleanup and restoration of Puget Sound. An expert panel, with technical and scientific expertise, will make recommendations for cleanup, restoration and preservation. \$8 million was provided to begin this challenge.

### ***STATE PARKS***

The natural beauty of Washington is nowhere more evident than in our state parks. \$4 million is provided for their maintenance and preservation.



## ***ENERGY FREEDOM***

We are developing a new industry in our state that provides both clean-burning, renewable energy, and good paying jobs. We established ambitious goals for boosting biodiesel and ethanol use in Washington, and took steps to promote biofuels grown on our local farms.

## ***HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT***

We have a responsibility to protect our children from toxic chemicals in the environment. We enacted the first ban on household products containing toxic flame retardants known as PBDEs, and will require all state agencies to use only "green" cleaning products.



### **Contact:**

#### **Office:**

204 John L. O'Brien Bldg.

P.O. Box 40600

Olympia, WA 98504-0600

**Phone:** 360-786-7814

#### **Email:**

sommers.helen@leg.wa.gov

### **Committees:**

Appropriations, *Chair*

Higher Education

Representative  
**Helen Sommers**  
PO BOX 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600



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